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Tuesday, 03 Jul 2012

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## A Word From Tim Downs - July 2012



Dear Friends,



The Annual Meeting of the Conference held in Birmingham, and organized around the theme "Cultivating a Culture of Call," was an important part of the growing focus on leadership development in the Southeast Conference. Holly MillerShank, the team leader of MESA (Ministry Excellence Support and Authorization) with the national UCC in Cleveland, was our keynoter, helping us peel back the layers to a deeper understanding of multiple paths to ministry and ways in which we can live into them. First Congregational UCC in Birmingham extended us abundant and extravagant hospitality. There was a wonderful spirit of community and common purpose throughout the meeting. Our workshops ranged from the practical to the educational, from financial management in the local church to coaching as a model of engagement of change. The TAP commencement was an occasion to recognize the students of the Birmingham churches, Victory for the World UCC in Stone Mountain, GA, and Holy Trinity Community Church in Nashville, TN who had completed the three-year course of theological study. Many are lay leaders in their own churches and represent another part of the Southeast Conference network of program and support for leadership development. We also celebrated the presence of over fifteen of our members in discernment for ministry.

In our business meeting, the Conference took important steps in shaping our future. We voted overwhelmingly to approve the changes to the UCC Constitution and Bylaws, which will open the way for the national setting of the church to focus leadership and resources more clearly on the common mission of the church through a unified governance structure. We approved a budget that dramatically reduces the deficit which we have carried over recent years and elected new officers as well as the first Conference-wide committee on ministry.

On the Monday following our annual meeting, Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark shared with me that she has accepted a position as Minister for Members in Discernment on the MESA Team in Cleveland. Her last day of work with the Southeast Conference will be August 31. Kathy has worked with the Conference for thirteen years, and has been instrumental in shaping and leading the ministries through which we have prepared lay and authorized ministers for serving the church. Her leaving is a deep loss to all of us, and certainly to me personally. She has been a good friend and colleague, a person who has taught me how to be a better teacher, pastor, and leader. She has shared her personal and professional gifts with us all with a gracious generosity. The Conference remains committed to the work that Kathy has led, and we



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[Creative poster project at S.C. UCC church drives home message of welcome, inclusivity](#)  
United Church of Christ roots in the South may not be as deep as in other parts of the country, but signs of the denomination are bustin' out in Clemson, S.C.



generosity. The Conference remains committed to the work that Kathy has led, and we are in the midst of preparing plans for assuring the continuation of TAP and PATHWAYS, as well as other parts of Kathy's ministry. You will want to make note that a farewell gathering will be held for Kathy on Saturday, August 25, 5:00-7:30 p.m., at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta. Details will be shared later, but we hope you will be able to be with us to celebrate Kathy's ministry among us, and to wish her well as she prepares to serve our beloved denomination.

#### **Election of New Officers to the Southeast Conference Board of Directors**

The Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference elected a slate of officers to lead us into this year of change. Jim Crabb, a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, was elected moderator. Jim has served on the Board previously and most notably as treasurer several years ago. Jennifer Austin, a member of Holy Trinity Community UCC in Nashville, was elected to serve as vice-moderator. Jennifer is the executive administrator of her congregation and has led the members through a major capital campaign, along with pastor Cindy Andrews-Looper. Ginny Nixon of Community UCC in Pleasant Hill, TN, will be the immediate past moderator. Jennifer Spears of Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, SC, will continue as secretary, and Jimmy Loyless of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, GA, as treasurer.

#### **In addition to those who will continue to serve on the Board, we welcome the following as new members:**

The Rev. Lillian Hallstrand and the Rev. Lawrence Clark, both of Brookmeade Congregational UCC in Nashville;

Jerome Gordon of Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, TN;

Jon Ritt of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta;

Desiree Pedescleaux of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta.

One of the most noteworthy actions of the Annual Meeting was the election of a provisional Committee on Ministry gathered from the leadership of the three associations. This committee will lead us into the new protocols and procedures for the preparation, authorization and oversight of ministers in the Southeast Conference. This body will be chaired by Lawrence Clark. It will include the following members:

Henrietta Andrews of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta;

Minister Dorinda Broadnax and Yelanda Collins, both of Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL;

Doug Farmer of Circular Congregational UCC, Charleston, SC;

The Rev. Dr. Marvin Morgan of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta, and presently interim pastor of Brookmeade Congregational UCC in Nashville;

Carrole Moss of Victory for the World UCC in Stone Mountain;

Kimberly Peeler-Ringer of Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville;

John Stewart of Church of the Savior (UCC), Knoxville, TN;

The Rev. Wayde Washburn of Sandy Creek UCC, Lafayette, AL.

Peace,

Tim Downs  
Conference Minister



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Local Church News - July 2012



- Congratulations and thanks to the members, and pastor Rodney Franklin, of First Congregational UCC in Birmingham,**

aided by the other Birmingham congregations, Beloved Community UCC, Angie Wright, pastor, and Pilgrim Church (UCC), Sally Harris, supply pastor, for the graciousness and hospitality they extended to the entire Conference, which gathered for our Annual Meeting hosted by First Congregational on June 8-9.
- Victory for the World UCC in Stone Mountain, GA, in collaboration with the Southeast Conference, hosted the UCC Still Speaking Writers Group on May 30.**

The event, moderated by Tim Downs, was live-streamed and watched by UCC members across the United States. A reception was hosted following the panel where attendees were able to mingle with the authors.
- The Deer Lodge, TN, Congregational UCC, pastored by Rose Hermonat, celebrates its 125th anniversary this year.**

A small church 45 minutes west of Knoxville, Deer Lodge Congregational has a long history of active witness to the community.
- Victory for the World UCC held an interfaith candlelight vigil on June 20 to witness against youth violence.**
- Congratulations to Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville, for success in a recent capital campaign.**

Members have cleared a number of hurdles to proceeding with the Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County zoning board, and are looking forward to beginning renovations soon and very soon!
- Congratulations to Uplands Retirement Village in Pleasant Hill, TN,**

on the occasion of hiring Richard Woodard as its new Executive Director. Richard is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), our sister denomination.
- Welcome back to the Southeast Conference the Rev. Holly and Rick Nelson!**

Holly served as a chaplain in Nashville for years before leaving to serve as a dean at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. The Nelsons are settling into Uplands Retirement Village and have joined Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN.
- We received word that Jeremy Rich, pastor of Bethany Congregational Church, Thomasville, GA, has received a call to serve First Baptist Church, also of Thomasville.**

He has announced his resignation from Bethany, and will begin his ministry with First Baptist on August 1. Jeremy is presently a member of the Southeast Conference Board of Directors.
- Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, received a Neighbors in Need Grant for \$2000 to**

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support an advocacy effort to address issues of hunger in the Atlanta area. The grant will be used to foster deeper collaborations among UCC congregations, and address the growing rift between affluence and poverty in the city.

The nationally known Talladega murals, commemorating the Amistad event and the history of Talladega College (established by the American Missionary Association and related to the UCC), are the feature of an exhibit at the High Museum in Atlanta. The murals will travel around the United States over the next three years, ending in Birmingham before being returned to the college. We hope you will make a point of viewing this important part of our UCC history when they come to or near your area.

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## Lifting Up... July 2012



**We are sad to announce the death of Rev. Dan L. Garrett, a member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA.** Dan died suddenly on June 26, 2012. Dan served as an interim pastor for United Church of Christ congregations in Georgia and Alabama. For the last nine years Dan worked for Grady Health System as the Staff Chaplain for the Infectious Disease Program.

A Memorial Service took place on Saturday, June 30 at 11:00 am in the Sanctuary. A reception followed in the Commons. Please keep Dan's wife, of 25 years, the Rev. Dana Overton-Garrett of Marietta and their family in prayer. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Villa International, 1749 Clifton Rd., Atlanta, GA 30329.

The congregation of **Victory for the World UCC, Stone Mountain, GA**, where two people were shot and killed, and two people were injured at a funeral at the church.

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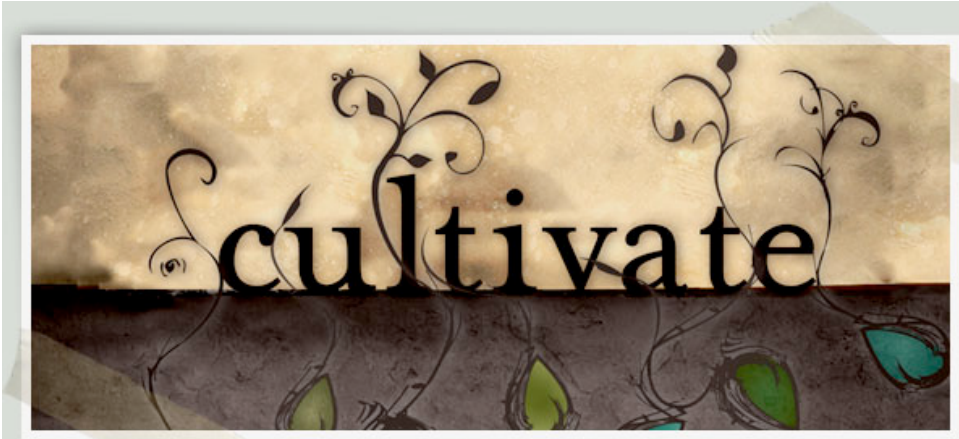
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Feature Focus - July 2012



Southeast Conference Gathers in Birmingham to Contemplate "Cultivating a Culture of Call"

By Kathy Clark

Every year of the last seven years we have lived together, my sisters and I have attempted to grow a small vegetable and herb garden. That is, after all, what country folk do, and since our move to rural northeast Georgia, we have considered that we ought to do the same. So each spring, we have watched for the signs that the last frost has passed, avoiding the temptation to get outside too early to play in the dirt, and we prepare to plant those seeds and small sprouts that we just know will grow to be an abundant crop, enough at least to can or freeze a few months' worth of homegrown deliciousness, with some left over to share with our neighbors and friends. With hope we have hoed and tilled, composted and planted, watered and weeded, waited and watched. And each year, frankly, we have been lucky to pick three or four ripe tomatoes, a handful of green beans, and a misshapen cucumber or two. They say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. I publicly confess, my sisters and I are insane gardeners, by definition. Hope may spring eternal, but our longed-for homegrown harvests do not.

Folks who are rooted in an agrarian culture, as many are in our Southeast Conference, have an innate understanding of the verb "to cultivate." They understand that plants, especially crops that are needed for the nourishment of life, do

of the verb “to cultivate.” They understand that plants, especially crops that are needed for the nourishment of life, do not just blossom on their own as if by magic, but are uniquely suited to particular environments, and must be carefully prepared for, nurtured, and attended to in order to grow and produce abundantly. Others, like my sisters and me, have an awful lot to learn from these folks if we want to enjoy more than one tomato sandwich per year. Perhaps we simply need to ask and listen, notice, and then nurture.

At the 46th Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference, we as a gathered community of faith took the time to contemplate what it means to cultivate a culture of call in and among our congregations. For faith to flourish, we must have leadership of all kinds, lay and authorized, serving in the church and in the world. The Revs. Elizabeth Clement and Holly MillerShank reminded us in workshops and worship that the church is fertile ground for growing leadership, but it does not happen on its own. Every member plays a role in cultivating leadership by noticing, naming, and nurturing the gifts with which God so abundantly surrounds us. It begins as simply as seeing and being seen – reaching out to one another, saying “I see you,” and responding, “I am here.” With that, and the gift of imagination, the work – and the joy – of ministry have begun. But it doesn’t stop there. Cultivating a culture of call takes as much wisdom, practice, and labor as does cultivating a crop of ruby red tomatoes. Seed and soil must be suited to one another. The community needs to come together to share collective wisdom, skills, tools, and know-how, watered by a good dose of corporate prayer, so that a bumper crop of faithful leaders can grow.

I looked up the word “cultivate” **on-line** and, in addition to references to tilling and fertilizing, this is some of what I found:

- To bestow attention, care, and labor upon, with a view to valuable returns;
- To direct special attention to; to devote time and thought to; to foster; to cherish.

I invite you to sit prayerfully with these words as you consider how yours is a calling congregation. These definitions speak eloquently to who we are as church and what it is we must do in order to grow. If we believe in and value the ministry of all the baptized, then we must bestow attention, care, and labor with a view toward that end. If we understand that the future of the church depends upon women and men who are uniquely prepared for ministry for “such a time as this,” then we must direct special attention to, devote time and thought to, foster, and cherish the potential leaders among us.

It is with humility that I confess my failings as a cultivator of crops. God grant me the wisdom and courage to attend to, cherish, and cultivate that which I value – a culture of call in our congregations. Perhaps next spring, my sisters and I ought to consider joining a community garden.

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## Conference News - July 2012



**Congratulations to Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark on the occasion of her call to serve with the Ministry Excellence, Support, and Authorization Team of the Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Cleveland, OH.** Kathy will begin her new ministry on September 17. Kathy's final day of work in the Southeast Conference will be August 31. There will be a reception to celebrate her thirteen years of ministry with us on Saturday, August 25 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Details will be announced soon.

Kathy will be missed by us all, but we celebrate her new ministry!

Below is the resignation letter from Kathy:

MEMO TO: The Churches of the Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ  
 FROM: Kathy Clark, Associate Conference Minister for Ministry Formation and Leadership Development  
 DATE: June 18, 2012  
 SUBJECT: "... in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."- 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with a great deal of thanks that I write to tell you that I have accepted a position on the national staff of the United Church of Christ, beginning September 17, 2012. I will be joining the Ministry Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team of Local Church Ministries as the Minister for Members in Discernment. It is with sadness, but gratitude nonetheless, that I must, therefore, resign my position as Associate Conference Minister of the Southeast Conference, effective September 15, 2012.

There will be opportunities to share more words with you later, but please allow me to say that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve with you and on your behalf. I have been shaped as a minister, a person of faith, and a dedicated member of the United Church of Christ by this conference and have been touched personally by so many of you who have shared your stories and journeys with me. I intend to maintain my standing with the Georgia-South Carolina Association; the Southeast Conference will always be home to me.

I will be working closely with our Conference Minister, Dr. Tim Downs; our Administrative Executive, Ms. Gerri Ryons-Hudson; and the Associate Minister for Theological Education, Dr. Sarah Kim – indeed all of my colleagues on the staff and the Board of Directors – to insure a smooth transition as we move into the future. In the words of Paul to the Philippians (1:6), "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." I hold you all in my heart—you, who have shared in God's abundant grace with me.

Blessings,

Kathy Clark  
 Associate Conference Minister

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Celebrations - July 2012



**Jennifer Crane**, a minister at Brookmeade Congregational UCC in Nashville, received the Secretary's Hands and Heart Award, a Veterans Administration award that recognizes an employee in each medical facility that consistently does the most to provide emotional support, help, and guidance to patients, above and beyond the call of duty. Those eligible for this award must encompass the whole spectrum of personnel involved in direct patient care. The awards are honorary.

**Lillian Hallstrand**, a member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC and chaplain at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, met the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright at a recent conference for the Association of Pastoral Counselors. Dr. Wright was instrumental in supporting the new church start strategies of the Southeast Conference in the late 1990s, and has been a good friend of the Conference.

At the Annual Meeting of the Conference we celebrated the following anniversaries of ordinations:

**Dorothea Lotze-Kola**, a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, employed by the Care and Counseling Center of Georgia, celebrates ten years of ordination. Dorothea is active in the life of the Conference, and a leader in developing our response to the new ways of preparing people for discernment for ministry.

**Maureen Shelton**, a member of Central Congregational UCC, celebrates twenty years of ordained ministry. She is currently a Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor at Emory Hospital Midtown in Atlanta.

**Lois Morrison**, a member of Howard Congregational UCC in Nashville, celebrates twenty years of ordained ministry. Lois is a hospital chaplain.

**Douglas Hunt**, a member of Church the Savior (UCC), Knoxville, TN, who works in environmental ministries, celebrates twenty years of ministry.

**Dan Rosemergy**, previously pastor of Brookmeade Congregational UCC and now serving a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Nashville, celebrates thirty years of ministry this year.

**John Pearson**, a member of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta and retired, celebrates fifty years of ministry this year.

**Leonard Stark**, a member of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN, and retired, celebrates sixty years of ministry this year.